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C O N F I D E N T I A L HARARE 002160

SIPDIS

AF/S FOR S. DELISI AND M. RAYNOR
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR J. FRAZER
LONDON FOR C. GURNEY
PARIS FOR C. NEARY
NAIROBI FOR T. PFLAUMER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/30/2008

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ZI](#)

SUBJECT: MUGABE WORKING AFTER POSSIBLE BRIEF "HEALTH
EPISODE"

REF: (A) IIR 692600504 (B) PRETORIA 5653 (C) PRETORIA

5639

Classified By: Political Officer Win Dayton under Section 1.5(b)(d)

1. (C) Reports that President Mugabe suffered a stroke or other debilitating illness within the past week appear to be unfounded. Reliable Embassy contacts confirmed that he had been sighted on numerous occasions during the past few days, including at a politburo meeting yesterday and at the construction site for his new mansion in suburban Harare. In addition, local TV footage October 29 showed him in apparent good health at the 14th General Assembly and Scientific Symposium of the International Council on Monuments and Sites in Victoria Falls, where he reportedly that day addressed delegates from 38 countries.

2. (C) One well-connected contact reported that Mugabe suffered some temporary "health episode" while attending his nephew's wedding in Zvimba (Mugabe's hometown) on October 25 but was treated by his doctor with no interruption to his work schedule. The source indicated that the episode was not serious or life-threatening; his account is uncorroborated. In any event, the weight of the evidence before us suggests that Mugabe continues to exercise the powers of his office as fully as one might expect of a relatively healthy man his age.

3. (C) COMMENT: Given his 79 years and perhaps reflecting wishful thinking among many here, rumors of Mugabe's ill health are frequent and not surprising. Were Mugabe to be seriously ill, the government quite possibly would intentionally conceal the fact, just as it attempted to hide the recent lengthy illness of the late Vice President Muzenda. On occasion Mugabe may go weeks without a public appearance, making reports of incapacity further difficult to verify. Some of the wilder turns of the rumor mill this time -- i.e., security forces barricading the city to prepare for a violent power struggle -- underscore yet again the deleterious effects of losing the country's only independent daily newspaper. We appreciate Pretoria's timely and useful coverage of these confusing reports as they emerged.
SULLIVAN